

**Count circles in
HAWAII/PACIFIC ISLANDS**

Geese and 145 Hawaiian Stilts at Kapaa Kauai were high counts.

The star showing among migratory waterbirds was a flock of 11 White-faced Ibis at Hanalei on the Kapa'a count on Kauai! (It's assumed these were all White-faced, as the flock members that could be identified were that species.) Until this year, one or two birds of the species have turned up annually, when they show up at all. In fact, such a large flock of any migratory ibis or heron species is unprecedented in Hawaii and is mind-boggling, considering the minimum 2000-mile oceanic crossing from North America. The topper, perhaps, was 18 Cattle Egrets reported this year, from Midway, where the previous high count had been two birds. The origin, or origins, of these egrets is difficult to assess, as some or all of the birds could have wandered up the Hawaiian chain from the introduced population on the main islands, or they could have migrated from Asia or North America. The matter is under study. Three Eurasian Wigeons on Oahu were the only vagrant ducks reported for the region this season.

Notable migratory shorebirds were high counts of Bristle-thighed Curlew (108)

on Midway, a Western Sandpiper on Laysan, high numbers of Long-billed Dowitcher at Kapaa, Midway, and Molokai, and a first count for Red-necked (1) and Red (5) phalaropes on Laysan.

A Short-eared Owl was reported for the first time on the Honolulu count. It can't be said whether this was a vagrant or a member of the residual native population. As for other resident land birds, a high count of 12 Akikiki from Kauai is welcome news, for the population of this beleaguered honeycreeper has crashed over the past two decades.

Several expanding populations of introduced species yielded high counts this year: Japanese Bush-Warbler (6) on the Kapaa circle, White-rumped Shama (6) on Molokai, and Saffron Finch (4) at Volcano. Two parrots new to the Honolulu count, Eclectus Parrot (1) and Tanimbar Cockatoo (1), joined the Sulfur-crested (4) and Salmon-crested cockatoos (2) that made their debut last year.

The Mariana Islands had a good showing of migrant rarities on the 104th Count: Gray Heron (1), Great Egret (1), and Little Egret (1) on Saipan, with two



**A flock of White-faced Ibis (*Plegadus chichi*), Kapa'a, Kaua'i, Hawaii.
Photo/Brenda Zaun, USFWS**

of the latter species on Rota and another on Guam; an Osprey on Rota; a Common Ringed Plover on Saipan; Black-winged Stilt (2) on Saipan; Black-naped Tern (2) on Rota; 10 snipe sp. on Saipan; and an unidentified accipiter on Guam. High counts of Wandering Tattler were reported from the two Guam circles and the Saipan circle.

As for resident Mariana land birds, high counts of most species were reported from Tinian, and a high count of the imperiled Rota White-eye is good news. A record number of Orange-cheeked Waxbills was tallied on Saipan, where the species was recently introduced.

MEXICO/BELIZE

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This was an extraordinary CBC for Mexico. Four new circles were set up in the Gulf of Mexico (coast of Central Veracruz), Peninsula de Yucatan (Rio Lagartos and Celestun), and Chiapas (Cañon del Sumidero). These circles are of great relevance, since southern Mexico was barely represented in the CBC.

Forty-two birders participated in these four new circles with great enthusiasm and success. All these circles are very promising regarding species richness, since they belong to the most tropical and diverse ecosystems of Mexico.

Also, two circles (El Cuyo-Yucatan and San Blas-Nayarit) were “rescued” from the past. These circles were active some years ago but were missed for the past several years. We hope they will be active every year again. This season 22 enthusiastic birders were involved in these two circles.

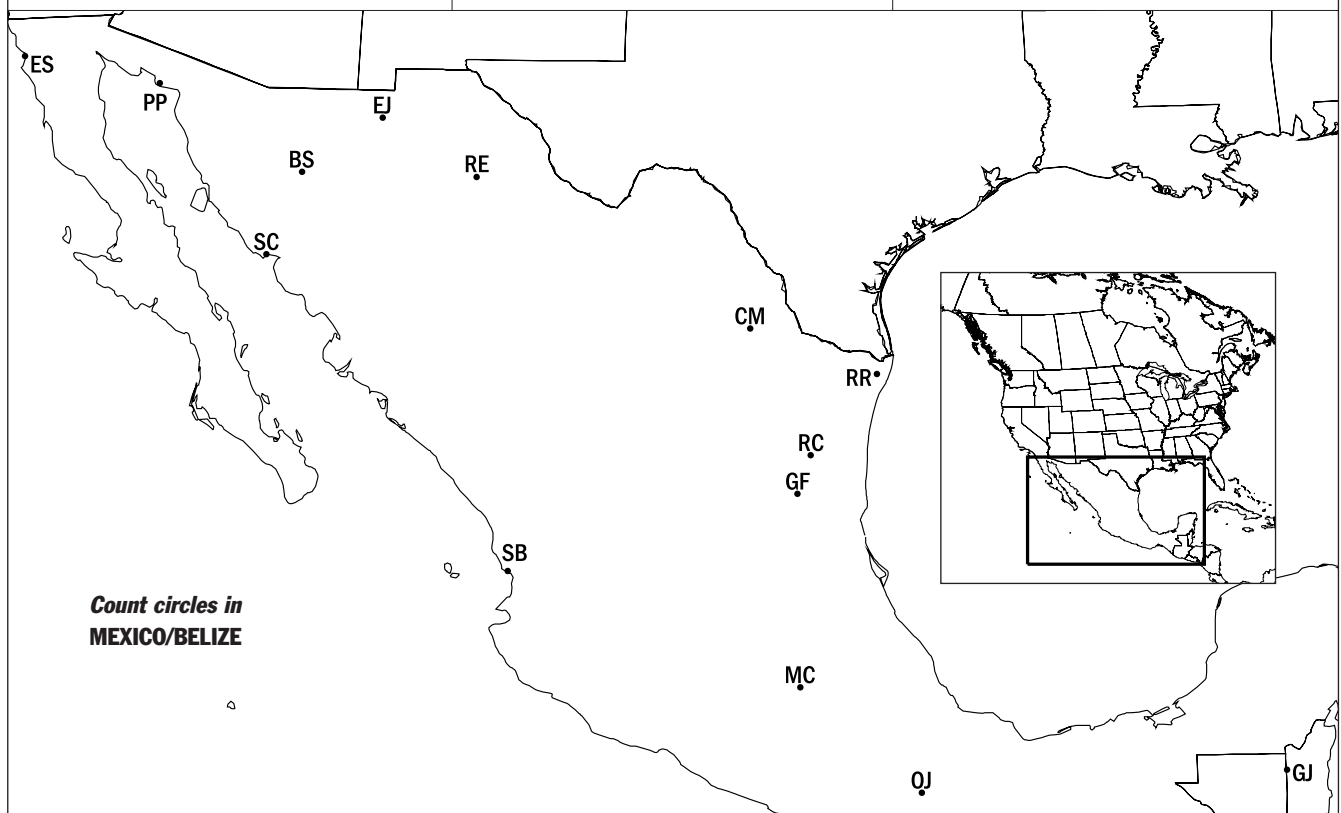
The six circles described together with 14 of the traditionally active circles from Mexico made for a total of 20 circles involved in the 104th CBC. Sadly, Belize was not as fortunate as Mexico, where only one (Gallon Jug) of the four traditional circles was included. However, this single circle had the highest number of birders involved (31) and, as usual, was one with the greatest bird richness.

A total of 265 birders participated in the region this year, counting a total of 118,767 birds, represented by 2706 taxa. The circles with the highest diversity of birds were San Blas Nayarit (219 species), Ensenada, Baja California

(203), and Gallon Jug, Belize (192). Ensenada stands out with the highest number of birds recorded, 38,729, followed by San Blas with 13,326, and Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, with 10,992.

The species seen in highest numbers were: Brown Pelican (4543, mainly in Puerto Peñasco and San Carlos, Sonora), Great-tailed Grackle (4121, more than 25 percent of them recorded at San Blas), Western Gull (3935, mostly in Ensenada), and Greater Flamingo (2988 in Peninsula de Yucatan in two of the most important Mexican breeding colonies, Celestun and Rio Lagartos).

Many unusual species were recorded, particularly in the northwestern part of the region. Ensenada registered nine unusual species (Black-chinned Hummingbird, Bell’s Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Bronzed Cowbird [count week], Orchard Oriole, and Baltimore Oriole), followed by Alamos Sonora with eight (Mexican Duck, Montezuma Quail, Common Pauraque, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Hairy Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, and Painted Bunting).



Count circles in MEXICO/BELIZE

Puerto Peñasco had seven unusual species (Neotropic Cormorant [count week], Lesser Nighthawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Townsend's Warbler [count week], Lark Sparrow, Lark Bunting, and Yellow-headed Blackbird), and Baviacora had six (Lesser Nighthawk [count week], Steller's Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, Nashville Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, and Western Tanager [count week]).

The Puerto Peñasco compiler provided relevant comments in the Special Aspects section regarding weather and environment conditions from that circle. This information is very useful to demonstrate why this circle stands out with remarkable records of both unusual species and high counts reports: "This year Puerto Peñasco was very interesting and as usual, quite different than last year. Two climatic events factored heavily in this year's bird species. One was Tropical Storm Marty, which was in the area over Puerto Peñasco on September 24 and 25 and dropped two to three inches of rain. That is more than it usually gets all year. The second factor was the warm temperatures, with a very hot October followed by a warm November and early December. Marty's rains caused a very good seed crop with green foliage over the entire area. Desert wildflowers were starting to bloom at this early date of December 20. For this reason some species were found in record numbers. The warm temperatures also caused some species to linger a little longer, and we were able to record at least a couple species that we don't normally get."

One of the remarkable successes obtained during the 104th CBC in Mexico and Belize was the establishment of new circles in Mexico with a growing participation of Mexican and/or local birders. Most of these new circles were set up in IBAs (Important Bird Areas), which made possible a very important link between two significant initiatives for bird knowledge and conservation. We are sure this linkage will provide relevant baseline information for the conservation of birds and their habitats,

providing at the same time a great opportunity for casual birdwatchers, birders, ornithologists, and citizens in general to get involved in these initiatives.

Thank you very much to those compilers who devoted time to include comments and interesting information on the "Special Aspects" form online, or who sent rare bird documentation for unusual species. This information is extremely valuable in better understanding what is going on each season in the region with bird populations.

Many thanks also to those compilers who restarted old circles in the region and to the ones who got involved for the first time in the CBC. Welcome all compilers and birders! Please remain enthusiastic and passionate in this meaningful effort!

We wish all CBC participants a wonderful, successful count this coming winter.

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil, Chile/Drake Passage, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Trinidad

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The good news: A Latin American count once again has broken the all-time CBC species tally, with Mindo-Tandayapa, Ecuador, recording 407 species. This tops the 400 recorded last year by the Rain Forest Aerial Tram, Costa Rica, which was hampered by poor weather this season.

The bad news: Compilers in Latin America had to overcome a chaotic online interface. These problems remained even after most North American counts had been fixed, and review was equally frustrating. Behind the scenes, the CBC database appears to store data correctly, but online, lists are still disorganized for most counts in this region. I have made a strenuous plea for the data entry program to be fixed, and for CBC results to be published as they once were. The importance of printed, published results cannot be overstated and become especially needed when electronic access is uncertain.

The remainder of this summary contains excerpts from comments reported in the Special Aspects section on the data entry form.

Lani Miller, compiler for Mindo-Tandayapa, lamented the data entry problems, noting how important the count has become locally: "The enthusiasm with which the CBC has been accepted in the town of Mindo is truly amazing and heartwarming...Ranchers and owners of primary and secondary forests want to know what birds are on their land and ask me for qualified ornithologists or guides to come to help them do a count. Since there are few experts, many of the ranchers have signed up for courses sponsored by CECIA (*Corporación Ornitológica del Ecuador*) and BirdLife International and have become their own experts." This count shows indications of continued deforestation at lower altitudes and possible effects of global warming, with many lowland birds such as Yellow-tailed Oriole, Buff-rumped Warbler, Snowy-throated Kingbird, Olivaceous Piculet, among many others, seen increasingly.

Joel Alvarado's and Jim Zook's comments on the La Selva, Costa Rica, count summarize aspects applicable to several counts in that country and one truly spectacular total for this long-running count: "This year La Selva was the only count on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica that had decent weather. Participants at Cartago, Monteverde, and the Rainforset Aerial Tram all had to suffer through miserable conditions. Many folks who had already been through the storms at these other counts were reluctant to try their luck again at La Selva...Unfortunately, a few of the most productive routes went undone due to a lack of knowledgeable leaders. Nevertheless, this year's effort produced the fourth highest species total in the 19-year history of the count. The count's cumulative species list is now up to 489 with the addition of five new species: Pinnated Bittern, Red-tailed Hawk, Violet Sabrewing, Hoffmann's Woodpecker, and White-winged Tanager.

Three of these (the hawk, sabrewing, and tanager) are visitors from higher elevations that sneaked into the count circle at its upper limits. The woodpecker has been expanding its range on

the Caribbean slope in the wake of deforestation and was to be expected.”

Lastly, I should report some aspects unrecorded in the CBC database for the Drake Passage count. These include:

seven *Eudypetes* sp., two Northern Royal Albatross (*sanfordi*), 10 Southern Royal Albatross (nominate *epomophora*), 40 Prion sp., two *Procellaria* sp., and one Diving-Petrel sp.

WEST INDIES/BERMUDA

Bahamas, Bermuda, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

Robert L. Norton

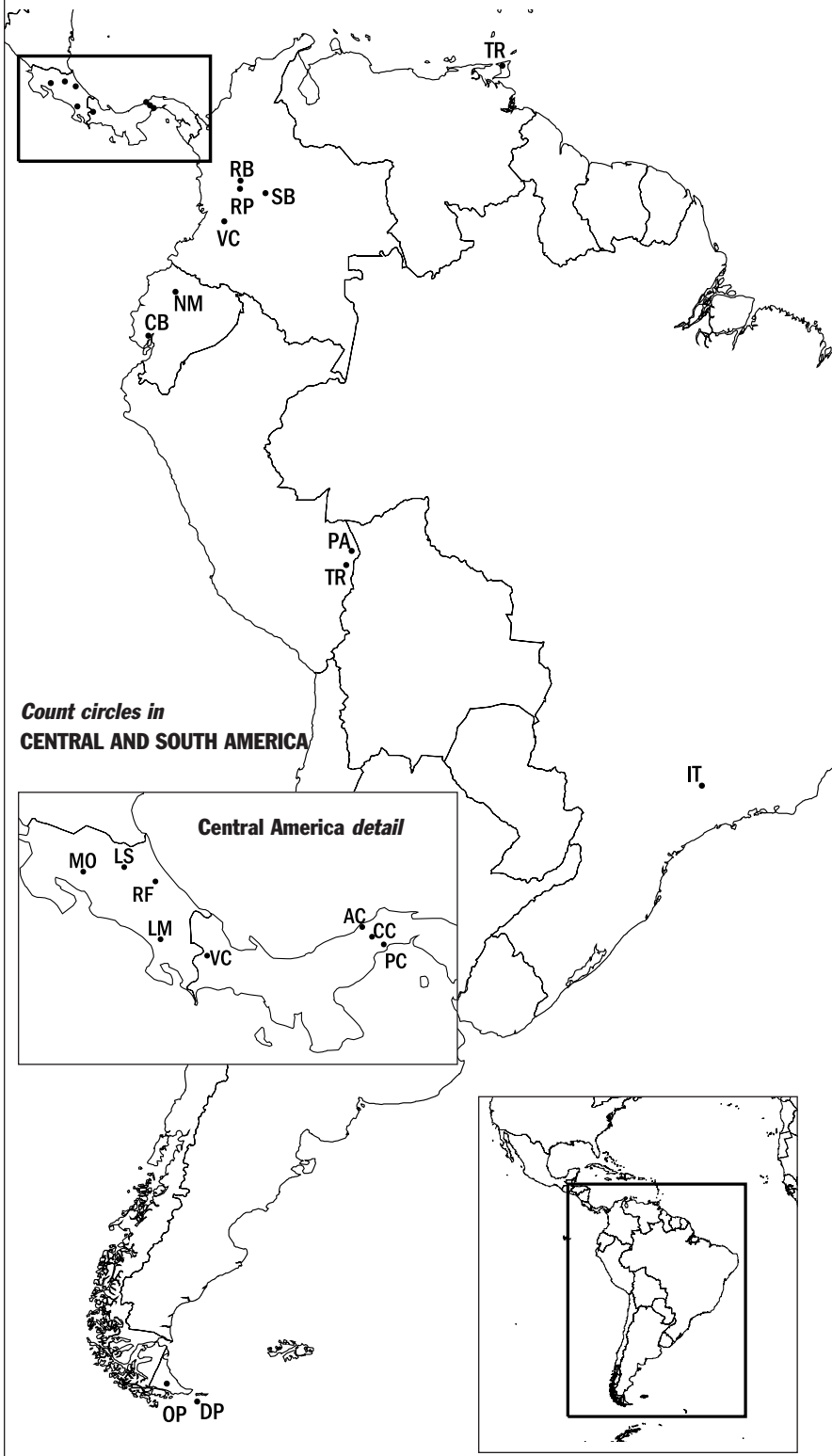
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Through this summary, I have tried for several years to compare the successive and current CBC species and numbers of a select group of birds representing migratory taxa: Anatids, Scolopacids, Sternids, and Parulid warblers. While these comparisons have shown trends perhaps resultant of northern temperate conditions, I now believe this summary should focus on resident indigenous species. Ultimately, CBC data could provide insight on the status and conservation of these birds. The comparisons I offer hereafter, hopefully, will concern resident land birds tied inextricably to their insular habitats. While CBC participants may rely from year to year on known populations of resident land birds, or perhaps take them for granted as an alternative to seeking out the rare vagrant, this analysis may provide some interesting trends itself over time. So, I urge participants and compilers to be particularly sensitive to monitoring and recording populations of resident birds. Their world is changing and we should be prepared to tell their story.

The Greater Antilles includes 11 count circles—with five in the Bahamas, two in the Dominican Republic (Hispaniola), and four in Puerto Rico—and four counts in the Virgin Islands, the eastern extension of the Greater Antilles. With six counts occurring on the Greater Puerto Rican platform, this provides an opportunity to view this biogeographic unit with a “transect” of several counts stretching from Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, in the



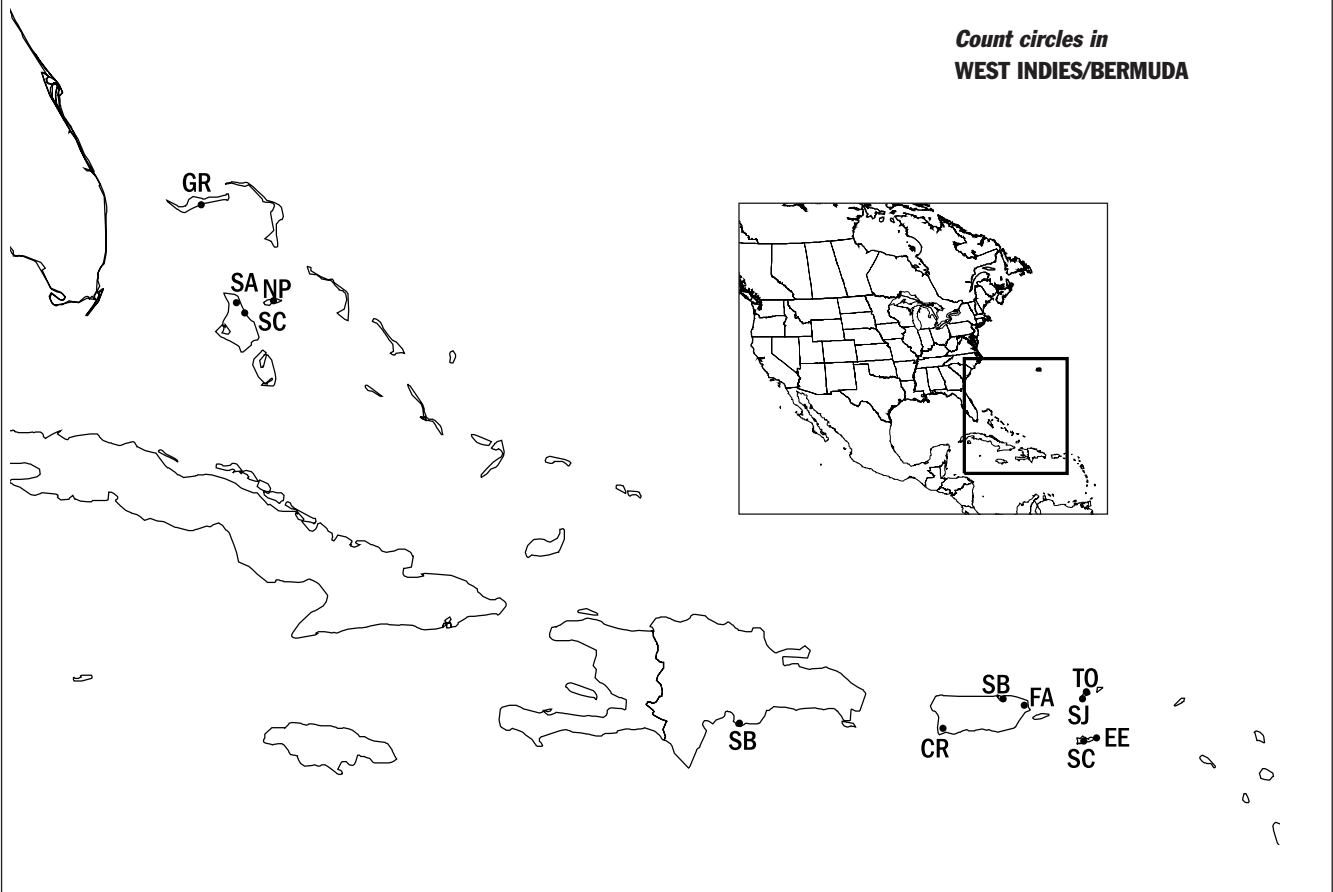
Count circles in CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Central America detail

west to Tortola, British Virgin Islands, in the east. Five counts in the northern Bahamas provide more of a “meta-population” view when they are consistently covered. For example, the distributions of Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, and Olive-capped Warbler are recorded from most of these circles. Annual records of these species could indicate trends, and past efforts have already contributed to the database. Encouraging resident volunteers on other islands would greatly improve data collection and trend interpretation.

Species to watch in the Antillean CBCs would include three species of parrots, three species of cuckoos, two owls, two nightjars, eight hummingbirds, three todies, four woodpeckers, five flycatchers, two swallows, three vireos, five tanagers, six warblers, two crows, three finches, three orioles, and two blackbirds. BirdLife International is following the status of the other high profile species. Monitoring resident land bird populations by knowledgeable citizens in these areas may accelerate conservation plans for endemic species and subspecies.

I suggest compilers choose or adopt and watch a species, genus, or guild of endemics that may be threatened in some way. Remember that data such as the number of participating observers; observer effort in time and distance, whether traveled on foot or by vehicle; and the time of day (or evening) are important statistics to measure trends consistently. From time to time this column will attempt to share data on a species, genus, or guild of resident endemics from the region.



Reminder

The Christmas Bird Count is always held December 14 through January 5.

To find out the date of a specific count, go to the CBC home page <www.audubon.org/bird/cbc> and click “Get Involved,” or contact your local Audubon chapter or center.

